

PROVO CANYON

2 tunnels are back in UDOT plan

Wildlife groups want agency to focus on larger section of road.

By Brooke Adams
Deseret News staff writer

PROVO — Twin tunnels are back in the plans for handling traffic through Provo Canyon between Vivian Park and Wildwood.

The Utah Department of Transportation decided recently that with slight modifications, its original plan to use tunnels through the narrow section of canyon makes sense.

"We feel the tunnels will really reduce the impact to the river and reduce the impact as much as possible to the Wildwood community," said Ahmad Jaber, UDOT District No. 6 preconstruction engineer. "It is really the best alternative we could do."

By putting a slight curve in the tunnel de-

sign, UDOT kept it out of the Provo River and away from Wildwood.

"Originally we wanted a straight tunnel because it gives a better visual impact," Jaber said. "People driving through can see the light at the end."

UDOT plans to begin construction on the tunnel phase next spring. The project will cost \$23 million and take two years to complete.

UDOT's return to the twin tunnel design pleases environmental and wildlife groups, Sundance and residents of Wildwood.

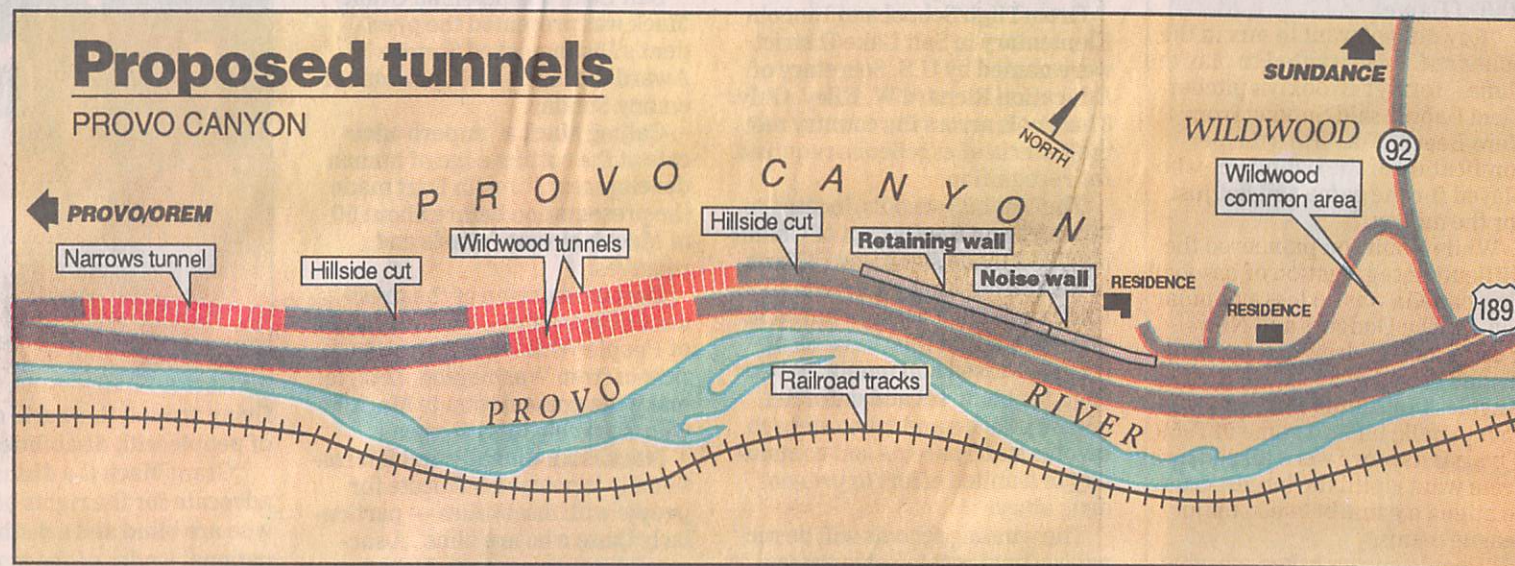
"We feel it was a win-win situation for everybody," said Julie Mack, environmental

facilitator for Sundance. "We're pleased UDOT found a way to stick to its original commitment not to disturb Wildwood or the river."

Lucille Taylor, president of the Wildwood Resort Co., said UDOT did its "very best to come up with a design that impacted Wildwood very gently." No homes will be torn out to make way for the road, although it will pass close to one home, Taylor said.

"Given the options, it's probably about as good as we could do," she said.

The road design UDOT adopted in a 1990 final environmental impact statement called for twin tunnels beginning just south of



Wildwood and ending just north of the Riverbend Trailer Park to carry all traffic. That design could have required removal of one or two homes in Wildwood.

But earlier this year, UDOT floated an alternative proposal: use a split design, with a 1,000-foot bridge crossing the Provo River twice to handle eastbound traffic and two tunnels to handle westbound traffic. Residents of Wildwood liked the plan because it kept the highway away from the small clutch

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of summer homes.

The proposal drew opposition from such groups as the Utah Wildlife Leadership Coalition, Trout Unlimited, the Division of Wildlife Resources and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The groups said the design, particularly the bridge over the river, would destroy wetlands and harm wildlife habitats.

Steve Schmidt, president of the Utah Trout Foundation, praises UDOT for listening and responding to the organizations' concerns.

But his group, as well as others, are turning their attention to the stretch of road just beyond Wildwood. It's even narrower, with the current two-lane road and the Provo River wedged between two steep canyon slopes.

"The next section is more lights and sirens than the last piece," Schmidt said. "There are a lot of complex design features and also very little room for it (the expanded road). It creates environ-

mental problems as far as impacts on habitat and critical wetland."

Wildlife groups sent UDOT a flurry of letters over the past two weeks urging the agency to "get out of the segmentation process." They want UDOT to design and work on the road between Vivian Park and Deer Creek Dam as a single section.

"To build this (the tunnel section) without looking at what will take place with the next piece is ludicrous," Schmidt said.

UDOT has not yet responded to the groups' requests.